TECH

More: Watch Casio Calculator Watch Features

30 Years Later, This Nerdy Watch Is Still Super Awesome

KARYNE LEVY

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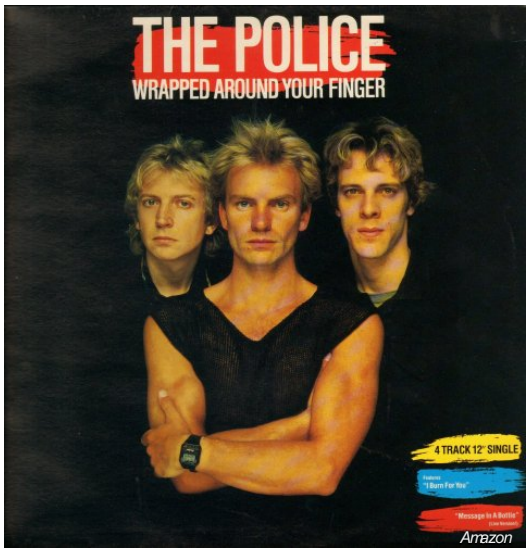
Before the Pebble blew past its Kickstarter goal; before the iWatch was a twinkle in anyone's eye; there was the Casio calculator watch. And it was awesome.



Even Sting wore a calculator watch; it's thought to be the Casio J-100.

The Casio calculator watch is still awesome. And that's why I just bought one on Amazon for $15.

I never had a calculator watch when I was a kid — the closest thing to a "smart watch" I had was a Game & Watch that played a "Popeye" game — and the one that I have now is hardly as cool as some of the ones from 30 years ago, although it's still pretty cool.

But the calculator watch phenomenon actually started way before Casio became synonymous with this type of timepiece. In fact the first Casio calculator watch came out almost five years after the first calculator watches hit store shelves.

There are debates about which calculator watch actually came first. Some say it was the Calcron LED Wrist Calculator, which was advertised in the "dads and grads" section of a 1975 Playboy magazine. But others say it was the Pulsar, formerly the Hamilton Watch Company, that was the first.

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Pulsar calculator watch

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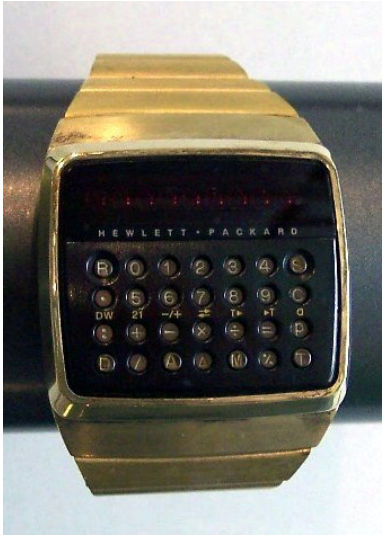
The Pulsar calculator watches hit the scene in 1975. They were 18-karat gold and sold for $3,950 (!) at high-end jewelry stores, like Tiffany. (You can buy one now on eBay for a whopping $27,500.)

The watch came with a tiny stylus so you could press the small buttons for the calculator. The battery lasted only a couple of weeks — the watch displayed information when you pressed a button or flicked your wrist, depending on the model, to save battery — and it was heavy and slightly uncomfortable to wear.

In 1976, the company came out with a less-expensive version in stainless steel ($550); a year later it had a 14-karat-gold-filled model for $495, and the stainless steel version dropped to $395.

Hewlett-Pakcard HP-01 calculator watch



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In 1977, Hewlett-Packard threw its hat into the ring with its own LED calculator watch, the HP-01. There were five models, and prices ranged from $650 to $850. It was smarter than most pocket calculators at the time, and could perform more than three dozen functions. And according to HP, "when HP discontinued manufacturing the HP-01, its inner workings were destroyed so no one would copy the extraordinarily small package engineering."

But competition was getting fierce, as LED was soon being replaced by more energy efficient LCD displays.

And that's where Casio came in.

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Casio C-80

Casio's calculator watches weren't the first of their kind, but Casio did offer the biggest variety of models. The company's first calculator watch was the C-80, which had buttons large enough that you didn't need to use a stylus.

The other great thing about it: It only cost around $50.

And this was just the beginning. That same year, Casio released a touchscreen calculator watch, the TC-50, for around $50, and the CM-32, which did metric conversions. In 1983 it released the CD-40, which was one of the first of a slew of watches — called Data Bank — that allowed you to store actual information, like phone numbers.

Casio CA-53W

42,352

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Which brings me back to the CA-53W that I just bought on Amazon. Since it's tax season, I've actually used it quite a bit. It's basic — it doesn't even have a light — but it brings back a wave of nostalgia when I look down at my wrist. Now I can be like Marty McFly from "Back to the Future," just like I always wanted to be.

Pocket Calculator

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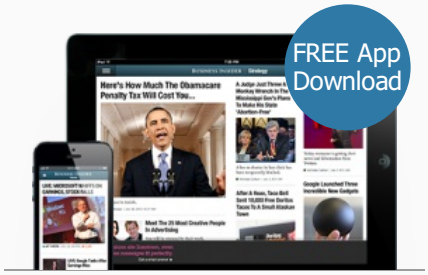

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